



Joshua Lederberg

Spreading Research Strikes Score on the Wrong Target

"RESEARCH STRIKE at MIT on March 4" headlined a news story of a spontaneous movement that has gained astonishing momentum among scientists and graduate students on American campuses.

The tone of the first rumors and reports was upsetting, not only to me but also to some of the acknowledged sponsors of the MIT event, according to a letter published in *Science* magazine. Profs. Boris Magasanik (biology), John Ross (chemistry) and Victor Weisskopf (physics) wrote that they had no strike in mind in the sense of an action against their employer, MIT, but rather "to halt their research activities for . . . a public discussion of problems and dangers related to the present role of science and technology in the life of our Nation . . . a gesture meant to underline the importance of the problems involved."

STUDENTS AND faculty at many other campuses, including my own (Stanford), have resonated to the sense of urgency and even despair that would motivate such a gesture. They have, however, wisely (in my own view) disavowed the pretense that they would stop thinking as a gesture of protest.

There are, after all, many pressure always operating to distract a scientist from thinking; I would rather resolve to work a little harder that day. Such a pious vow would attract few headlines.

As an alternative, these students have called for a convocation on the role that scientists can play to speed the positive human uses of their efforts. The challenge can hardly be ignored; it is one of the greatest issues of our times. We hardly know where to begin, but it is certainly true that the universities have been negligent in teaching some or the simplest facts about the actual conduct of research.

We find many people who should know better, including Congressmen as well as undergraduates, talking about an annual research budget of \$17 billion as if these were funds spent in academic research at universities rather than the whole Federal investment in research and development, mostly defense development. Many students entertain the myth, therefore, that university research is mainly subsidized by the Department of Defense.

IN DUE course, clichés about the military-industrial-academic complex become slogans for campus protest and disruptive strikes. The first order of business for these convocations is, then, a factual review of the actual disposition of scientific effort: academic research takes up just 10 per cent of the R. & D. budget, medical research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health being the preponderant item, at a level somewhat over a thousandth of the gross national product.

The anger and frustration that drive students and researchers even to think about a research strike are not really directed to the science policy of the Government, which has been shoddy—except that it is also the most enlightened the world has ever seen. They are directed to the failure of our political institutions to solve the prob-

lems of war and poverty and are particularly provoked by the inertia that moves a project like the antiballistic missile, as if we lived in a dream world that could ignore the anxieties and adaptations of the Russians and the Chinese to our moves.

I CAN understand the anger that leads to protest. But I would also charge my students and colleagues that they have a precious asset more valuable than their rising voices: the skills, training and temperament to analyze difficult problems with scientific objectivity. Our scattered ideas on how to achieve world security have never reached the level of consensus easily won by good science; problems as difficult as this are postponed by prudent scientists, if they can.

Our political establishment may be incredibly obtuse about seeming common sense on some issues. Nevertheless, I doubt that accredited scientists in any field would face insuperable obstacles in funding innovative research even if it were openly aimed at world peace.

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